

## **Washington Helitack About Us**

### **Day to Day Operations**

The Helitack Program fire season base of operations is the Southeast DNR Office located at the Ellensburg Airport. During the summer six helicopters are fully staffed for interagency initial attack (IA) fire response throughout the state. Each day personnel are assigned to one of the six aircraft and support trucks.

Crew staffing is different for each helicopter, so flexibility and communication are a crucial part of operations. A daily schedule is updated as to the availability of aircraft and the order in which ships will be dispatched.

Each crew takes responsibility for making the helicopter fire ready. Helicopters are inspected and washed, tools and equipment are inventoried and repaired, and readiness and bucket drills are performed. When a dispatch is received, the helicopter crew(s) is notified to report to the flight line.

### **Physical Training (P.T.) Standards**

The Washington State Helitack Program takes physical training very seriously. P.T. is emphasized by DNR to ensure a fit and fire-ready crew. This program puts an added emphasis on physical fitness because of the arduous aspect of the job. Every firefighter is expected to perform at a high level of physical fitness. The crew generally spends 1 1/2 hours each morning on physical training. Basic workouts consist of a three mile run followed by physical fitness drills.

### **Equipment**

DNR currently operates six helicopters during the fire season from an inventory of 5 Hueys (4 DNR and 1 Chelan County Fire District #1) and 4 AH-1 Cobras. The program also operates and staffs 6 support trucks and 9 fuel trucks for response to the nearest fueling location on a fire incident.

### **Pilots and Helicopter Operations**

Helitack pilots are hired as seasonal career employees by the Washington State DNR. Pilots may be cross trained for both types of aircraft (Hueys and Cobras). Pilots typically perform a range of missions including: long and short line bucket work, long line cargo sling load, internal cargo loads, crew transportation, and reconnaissance/aerial observation.

### **Historical Fire Response**

In 2006 the Helitack Program responded to 121 incidents and flew a total of 935 hours.

In 2005 the Helitack Program responded to 83 incidents and flew a total of 735 hours.

In 2004 the Helitack Program responded to 190 incidents and flew a total of 912.9 hours.

In 2003 the Helitack Program responded to 133 incidents and flew a total of 922 hours.

In 2002 the Helitack Program responded to 99 incidents and flew a total of 508 hours.

In 2001 the Helitack Program responded to 93 incidents and flew a total of 650 hours.

In 2000 the Helitack Program responded to 55 incidents and flew a total of 350 hours.

## **Training**

Training is taken very seriously within the Helitack Program. It is an important way to instruct new members in procedures as well as to keep all members safe, up to date, and on the same page before and during the fire season. Each member of Helitack is trained, at a minimum, as a basic firefighter (FF2) and Helicopter Crewmember (HECM). Squad Boss (FF1) training is given to returning members. Crew Supervisors and crew managers receive training as federal helicopter managers (HELB, HCWN), and Helibase Managers (HEB2), as well as a wide range of fire behavior and incident commander training opportunities.

## **Maintenance**

Major helicopter maintenance is performed at the DNR hangar at the Olympia Airport. General field inspections are performed every 25 flight hours. After 150 hours of flight time, each helicopter undergoes a full and detailed maintenance inspection at the Olympia hangar.

## **Staging Details**

Throughout the summer crews are detailed in staging locations throughout the state based on fire danger, red flag warnings, lightning, and general pre-suppression needs. Crews must be ready and available to be staged away from the Ellensburg base for up to 14 days at a moment's notice. Some of these locations have in the past included: Omak, Colville, Deer Park, Dallesport, Pomeroy, Wenatchee, and Olympia.

## **Housing and Accommodation in Ellensburg**

There are many housing opportunities in and around Ellensburg, especially during the summer season when many Central Washington University students return home. Typical rent for a two bedroom apartment is between 500-700 dollars per month. A good place to search for accommodations is the classifieds section of the Ellensburg Daily Record.

## **Recreation in and Around Ellensburg**

Ellensburg is geographically located at the foothills of the Cascade Mountains in the Kittitas Valley. Opportunities for hiking, camping, hunting, biking and other outdoor activities surround the area. The Yakima River, offering some of the finest fly fishing in the Northwest, flows through Ellensburg. Floating the river is a thoroughly enjoyable experience on a hot summer day. Ellensburg is located 40 miles from the Gorge Amphitheater. Throughout the spring and summer the Gorge hosts an array of concerts. The Gorge is one of the most popular outdoor venues in the United States. The Ellensburg Rodeo occurring every Labor day weekend is one of the "old rodeos." It has earned its place as one of America's Top 25 professional rodeos. Surround all this with the fun of the Kittitas County Fair, the old-west hospitality of the City of Ellensburg, and you can understand why in Ellensburg, it's "More than just your average rodeo."

## **Agency Training Opportunities**

In 2008 Washington State Helitack will offer mini workshops to other agencies (including fire districts) on helicopter protocol and procedures within Helitack. These Informational meetings and training exercises are designed to demonstrate how Helitack can be used to effectively stop potentially large fire situations. The program will stress safety in all operations around helicopters. These meetings/training exercises must be scheduled during the months of March and April, and will be conducted in late April and into May. For further information on this program, or to schedule a training session please call (509) 925-0958.